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[Bringing Britain into being: sociology, anthropology and British lives.](#)

The Sociological Review 2017, 65(1), 20-34.

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DOI link to article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0081176917693494>

Date deposited:

26/01/2017

Bringing Britain into being: sociology, anthropology and British lives

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Abstract

In this Introduction to the volume, we argue that the time is over for thinking reductively of the anthropology of Britain as simply 'anthropology at home'. We also argue for the importance of creating space to promote fresh intellectual dialogue between anthropology and sociology. Both sociologists and anthropologists working on aspects of British social life are equally engaged, now more than ever, in the critical investigation of a common set of major issues such as the increase in cultural and ethnic nationalisms, economic austerity and its manifold impact on communities and individuals, and growing social and economic inequalities. Recognising disciplinary contributions to areas of mutual scholarly interest offers not only sources of intellectual inspiration for anthropologists and sociologists alike but also opens up possible avenues for forging institutional alliances and solidarities in the current political and economic climate of uncertainty for both disciplines.

¹ Degnen and Tyler have each contributed equally to the writing of this piece.

Key words: Anthropology, sociology, Britain, ethnographic approaches, UK, anthropology of Britain

Introduction

The Sociological Review has a long history of publishing at the interface of sociology and social anthropology. The journal also has a history of publishing work within the anthropology of Britain, such as the *Festschrift* for Ronnie Frankenberg (Macdonald, Edwards, & Savage, 2005) and a number of anthropologists studying Britain who have served as editorial board members (including Pnina Werbner, Sharon Macdonald, Sarah Green and Michaela Benson). In this volume, our aim is to develop these important aspects of the journal's history and focus by putting theoretical debate and ethnographic insights drawn from state of the art research within the anthropology of Britain explicitly into conversation with contemporary sociology. Indeed, our contention is that this volume will add a new dimension to issues of shared concern across the disciplinary lines. We invite readers of *The Sociological Review*, both anthropologists and sociologists, to join us in challenging narrow disciplinary debates in the pursuit of common research agendas.

Crucial to this endeavour is an exploration of the ways in which the ethnographic study of Britain contributes to substantive issues and theoretical concerns that are central not only to anthropology as a wider discipline, but also more broadly to sociological inquiry. In this regard, we have purposively chosen to focus our inquiry on substantive and theoretical issues that are pressing ones for anthropologists and sociologists alike. These include: questions of nationhood, post-colonialism, racialised difference, place, migration, everyday relations with the nation-state, social class, post-industrialism, the environment and more-than-human interactions. We explore how understandings of these issues become enriched and deepened by turning our comparative, finely grained, ethnographic, theoretical and methodological insights on them whilst in conversation with sociological insights on the very same topics.

The lynchpin of this endeavour is the monograph's contribution of an anthropological approach to the sociological project of challenging and subverting social policy myths and stereotypes about Britons and British social life, as well as complicating commonsensical understandings of the world. Indeed, if there is anything that can crystallise the common ground between the two disciplines, it is this shared adeptness at scrutinising the taken for granted in social and cultural worlds. Our contention is that this volume will not only

serve to influence the ways in which sociologists think about the potential contribution of the anthropology of Britain to their empirical and theoretical concerns, but will also raise questions about the impact of the anthropology of Britain for how anthropology thinks about itself. In short, our intention is for this monograph to challenge and disrupt traditional notions of the anthropology of Britain as simply the practice of social anthropology 'at home' by illuminating the ways in which this area of inquiry is outward looking in terms of its interdisciplinary scope, theoretical, philosophical and social policy perspectives and concerns. This Introduction is part review of the intellectual and historical relationship between sociology and anthropology, part manifesto that calls for anthropology and sociology to ally and rally institutionally in these austere times for higher education in the UK, and part overview of the volume itself.

This monograph draws on papers asked to address these themes at a symposium held at the University of Exeter in September 2014 to celebrate 10 years of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Britain and the Commonwealth's (ASA) Anthropology of Britain (AOB) Network. The AOB Network, co-convened since 2003 by us – Tyler and Degnen - consists of over 150 scholars with a shared interest in British society from an ethnographic point

of view.² In this Introduction, we reflect on how the experience of convening the AOB network has taught us to think of the anthropology of Britain as a set of practices, and how it is we think these practices speak to the theoretical, methodological and substantive issues of central concern to sociology and anthropology more broadly. We in turn use these reflections as a platform from which to introduce the scope and content of the themes explored in the articles that follow.

Taking inspiration from the Anthropology of Britain Network

In founding the AOB network over a decade ago, we made the assumption that there was a group of people 'out there' who identified with and recognised their work as contributing to something that could be called an anthropology of Britain. It seems as though we were right: there was and there is, as our decennial meeting in Exeter attests to and which this volume has grown out of. But, these are categories and assumptions that also require careful attention in greater detail here and in the volume as a whole. For as much as we have both

² We would like to acknowledge and thank Prina Werbner for alerting us in 2003 that the ASA was creating a facility for networks and suggesting to us that we should launch an Anthropology of Britain network. We are grateful for her initial suggestion and subsequent support.

been gratified and enthused by the experience of contributing to anthropological knowledge of contemporary Britain, such an identity has also never been a straightforward one for either of us, leaving us both at times with more questions than answers. That is to say, we recognise that by asserting that there is 'something British' and from an 'anthropological' perspective to be discussed, we in turn draw issues of Britishness (and what Britishness is not) and anthropology (and what anthropology is not) into question.

For one illustrative example of the dilemmas these categories present, consider Tyler's brief discussion with a colleague about the AOB network. It gives a sense of some of the contradictions we have encountered when we have made assumptions about who or what might constitute the anthropology of Britain. In this instance, Tyler suggested to a colleague that she might want to become involved in the network, assuming that this researcher would identify with the anthropology of Britain because she is a social anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork in a state-funded institution in London. Tyler's colleague explained instead that her work contributes to and speaks to the anthropology of the environment and not Britain or Britishness. For Tyler's colleague, the anthropology of Britain suggests a focus on nation and so she could see how Tyler's work on race, ethnicity and identity engages with it but that her own does

not. Here, then, whilst one researcher perceived scope for connection between social anthropologists based on ethnographic locale ('Britain'), another's interpretation of the very same category ('Britain') instantiated cause for distancing. It is in part encounters such as these that have led us to conclude that it is not a definition of the anthropology of Britain that is required. Nor do we think that debates and discussions over which scholars are included and excluded within this area of inquiry very useful. In this sense, we want to avoid lapsing into a kind of 'groupism' that relies on fixed notions about what literature and which scholars constitutes the anthropology of Britain and what it sets out to achieve.

Rather, what we propose is of central importance is that the coming together as a group permits scholars to create an identification and sense of affiliation. We became a loose grouping with shared interests, which in turn permits scholars with an interest in British society to create space to share, debate and learn from each other in a way that is not otherwise possible. It is this broad approach to the anthropology of Britain that has informed the way in which we have convened the AOB network, and which in turn underpins the approach to the study of the anthropology of Britain that we are advocating here.

Indeed, in our experience sociology is a discipline that anthropologists of Britain cannot ignore, a point that a brief description of our own academic trajectories and biographies illuminates. We each completed our undergraduate studies, doctoral and postdoctoral work within anthropology departments. Degnen's (2012) work based upon fieldwork in the North of England contributes in part to the interdisciplinary endeavour of critical ageing studies, and Tyler's (2012) work draws on fieldwork in the Midlands area of England to contribute to ethnic and racial studies. Both these interdisciplinary fields of inquiry are dominated by sociological work and thought. In this sense, our respective research concerns within anthropology simultaneously connected us intellectually to substantive and theoretical debates within sociology. Moreover, we have both lectured in sociology departments for a number of years. The accumulation of our affiliations within both anthropology and sociology means that we have thus come to understand ourselves to be intellectually and institutionally positioned *amongst* the disciplines of social anthropology and sociology (Donaldson, Ward, & Bradly, 2010). However, we also recognise that while sociology is a discipline that we each have an established relationship with in the UK, not all social anthropologists working on issues of Britain will share our perspective and experiences. Nor will all sociologists who might share our interest in contemporary British social lives. Given our own career trajectories and

research expertise, we believe that putting these two disciplines into clearer juxtaposition offers valuable scope to garner new insight into contemporary social realities, possibilities and dilemmas.

And yet, the relationship between sociology, the anthropology of Britain and the wider discipline of social anthropology is one characterised by friction and tension. Our contention is that the friction and tension generated by these relations is productive (cf Tsing, 2005), but not always amicable. To explore an aspect of this tension, we begin by reflecting upon how Les Back, now a Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths College, relates his experience of presenting his early anthropological work conducted in Britain to anthropology colleagues.

Sisters at war? The Anthropology of Britain in relation with sociology and anthropology

Back writes how, having just completed his PhD in social anthropology in the early 1990s, he was invited to give a seminar paper on his work to his peers and fellow postgraduates at the anthropology department in which he studied

for his doctorate. His thesis explored the ways in which racism featured in the lives of young South Londoners and the formation of intercultural dialogues across ethnic and racial identities (2002, p. 39). Before Back began to present his paper on the meaning of young people's "wind-ups" within youth clubs, the Chairperson, one of the lecturers in the Department, asked him:

"Are you going to do the voices?"

"What?" Back replied, a little confused.

"Are you going to do the voices?" the Chairperson reiterated.

"What do you mean?" Back asked.

"You know", the Chairperson paused for a moment before simulating the voice of 'an ignorant male hooligan', "you know – 'YOU FUCKING CUNT!!!" (original emphasis, 2002, p. 39).

Back's retelling of this experience illustrates what he understood to be at that time "a double standard" (2002, p. 39) concerning those who deserve the full seriousness of anthropological attention, and those who do not. That is to say, Back felt that the practices and beliefs of those that live in the Amazonian rain forest or the interiors of South East Asia would not have been treated with this derision and lack of respect. However, for the Chairperson at Back's seminar,

the voices and lives of those that live just around the corner did not deserve the same level of ethnographic seriousness as others more geographically and culturally distant. But yet, as Back later pointed out to us when discussing with him this event, by speaking the voices of young South Londoners in received pronunciation, he took something ethnographically away from these young people by reaffirming the legitimacy of standard middle class talk.

For us, this anecdote raises not only the complexities of representation, but also the derision within British social anthropology for most of the twentieth century towards the anthropological study of Britain. Ethnographic research within the UK was seen by some more traditional social anthropologists to challenge the discipline's 'proper' and 'real' concern with the study of 'cultural difference and otherness' outside of Britain, Europe and the West. We surmise that one source of this tension concerning the anthropological study of Britain was that anthropology 'at home' was thought to blur the boundaries and intellectual division of labour between social anthropology and other disciplines including sociology. For example, if we turn to the wider history of sociology and anthropology in the early twentieth century, sociologists' key concern was the study of modernity. British-based social anthropologists were on the other hand more concerned with studying non-industrialised societies, most notably those

that formed part of the British empire (Peel, 2005). We shall return to a fuller exploration of this history later on in this essay, but suffice to say for now that this historical vision of a division of labour between social anthropology and sociology underpins the derision Back experienced. We suggest that this derision is an indicative sign of the sorts of intellectual territory-claims that some anthropologists were deeply invested in making and reproducing.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between these experiences in the UK with what Gledhill and Wade (2012) write about in regards to the sense of second-classness amongst anthropologists in North America not working with indigenous First Nations peoples, but who are instead researching US and Canadian society more broadly. These researchers first organised in 1990 and then three years later became the Society for North American Anthropology (with the inclusion of Mexico). Gledhill and Wade write that:

the ethos of this large group of scholars has been sharply critical, not only of much of the public debate about social problems in the United States but also of anthropology's tendencies, when defined as the study of 'cultural difference', to 'other' its objects of study without regard to the wider political and economic context of their lives and the historical

forces, including US imperialism, which have shaped them (Di Leonardo, 1998). This made...the United States and Canada fertile terrain for studies of the social impacts of the restructuring of advanced capitalist economies and urban transformation through gentrification, achieved through ethnographic studies (2012, p. 489).

Gledhill and Wade call our attention to how authors such as Di Leonardo and Bourgois “provided new perspectives on phenomena such as gangs: anthropologists challenging the essentialist cultural and racial models that pervade public debate” (2012, p. 490) in North American contexts.

Returning to the UK, if we fast forward twenty-five years from when Back presented his seminar paper, it would seem that the disciplinary friction within anthropology over the study of Britain has been transformed into a more dynamic set of relationships than before, one that allows for an exchange of individuals, theories, data and methodological approaches between anthropology, the anthropology of Britain, sociology and other disciplines. A creative space now exists, reminiscent of a period in the 1960s, whereby social anthropologists who study Britain can teach and work within and outside of social anthropology departments without having to defend their ‘proper’

anthropological credentials. But this relationship also has an important history, and one that we will return to, below.

We suggest that this current confidence within the anthropology of Britain is due to the pioneering work of those anthropologists who have dedicated their working lives to studying aspects of British society, including Jeanette Edwards, Nigel Rapport and Pnina Werbner, whose reflections we include in this volume. Collectively these anthropologists, and others, have shown in their work how the study of British social life contributes ethnographic, theoretical and methodological insight to substantive issues and philosophical concerns that are central to the wider discipline of social anthropology. Our contention is that it is now the time for social anthropologists who study Britain to extend that discussion with confidence to other disciplines.

We know full well how complex institutional and intellectual disciplinary configurations are within both sociology and anthropology, and how partial and contradictory interdisciplinary relations can be. But yet, we also know that any straightforward notion of the intellectual division of labour between sociology and the anthropology of Britain is artificial, as illustrated by the issues and concerns explored in this volume. Nonetheless, the institutional practices put to

work to shore up disciplinary boundaries and to reproduce them, are also real. They have tangible intellectual effects. However, today when sociology, anthropology and the anthropology of Britain are seen to be in tension with each other, it is not a case of simply having to identify with and defend one camp or the other. Rather, we suggest there is something more interesting to consider, and it is in this contact zone betwixt and between the disciplines that this volume takes its full anthropological force and sociological meaning.

“Branches of the same subject”: A historical and institutional perspective on the relationship between anthropology and sociology in Britain

Having established above the recent institutional setting in which an anthropology of Britain needed to assert itself against internal disciplinary biases, we would like next to turn our attention to the broader historical and intellectual contours of the relationship between anthropology and sociology in Britain, a history that also shapes the formation of the anthropology of Britain. This provides the institutional and historical context in which the articles in this volume are situated.

We take as our point of departure the idea that the relationship between anthropology and sociology in contemporary UK academia can perhaps best be described by and large as studied indifference if not outright hostility. This friction between the disciplines is facilitated in part by the differing ways in which both sociology and anthropology have strong disciplinary identities in Britain. David Mills (2008) in his insightful political history of British social anthropology attributes the tendency of social anthropologists in particular to feel rather attached to a disciplinary identity because of anthropology's relative small size and "distinctive history. In the UK, if not in the USA, the discipline has sought to retain and defend an intimate and close-knit community of scholars. Marked theoretical differences are tolerated because a discipline of small size can easily unite behind the flag of institutional vulnerability" (2008, p. 175). In contrast, Mills claims that the identity of British sociologists "derives from a more inclusive and reformist history, even if its rival moieties often seem to be perpetually feuding" (2008, p. 175). Having said this, many scholars move comfortably between various aspects of disciplinary identities, and affiliating as sociologist or anthropologist are part and parcel of their professional identity formations (cf Mills). This we suggest is testimony to the overlapping and intertwined intellectual and institutional histories of the disciplines, a relation that led John Peel (2005) to describe the subjects as "siblings who came to be

brought up in different environments, but who still remain in regular contact with one another, and whose resemblances are so close that they are sometimes mistaken for one another” (2005, p. 70).

There are three broad points we would like to make in regards to the history of this relationship. The first is that what is striking when reading Mills’ (2008) and Peel’s (2005) respective accounts of the development of anthropology in Britain through the twentieth century is the extent to which sociology winds through it. Sociology criss-crosses the story of anthropology in Britain in an astonishing number of places in comparison with today’s institutional distance and suspicion. For instance, Mills recounts Max Gluckman’s achievements in building up a joint anthropology and sociology department at Manchester in the 1950s and early 1960s (2008, p. 93-4, 105). Spencer also points to the growth of new departments in the 1960s university expansion whereby “many of the British [anthropologists] moved into chairs and readerships, often in new joint anthropology and sociology departments, in the subsequent decade” (2000, p. 12) and he mentions Peter Worsley, Max Marwick, and Ronald Frankenberg (2000, p. 5) in particular. Also noteworthy here are Michael Banton and Ernest Gellner – key figures who moved effortlessly across the disciplinary divide (Peel, 2005).

Our second point about the history of relations between anthropology and sociology in Britain is one of institutional scale, prestige and class dimension. Mills reminds us that in 1947 there were fewer than a dozen permanent university posts in British anthropology, and only four UK universities (UCL, LSE, Edinburgh and Cambridge) provided undergraduate degrees in the subject (2008, p. 94-95). Nonetheless, by the 1950s British social anthropology, despite its small size, had “gained ... a high degree of official recognition” and “prestige” (Peel 2005, p. 73) which was in part dependent upon anthropology’s intimate connections with the “colonial administration – traditionally a career of gentlemen” (MacRae, 1961, p.36 as cited in Peel, 2005, p. 73). A further indication of the discipline’s status was its success in becoming established early on in the twentieth century at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. By contrast, sociology was denied such credentials and prestige, only becoming solidly established at Oxbridge much later on (Bulmer, 2005, p. 44-45). In addition to this, Bulmer reflects in his discussion of twentieth century British sociology how “it has often been observed that the social background of UK academics in social anthropology differs from that in sociology, though this generalization is impressionistic rather than precise” (2005, p. 46), but in so

doing points to the ever present British class dynamics as they make themselves manifest in academia.

Notwithstanding these real and impressionistic distinctions, the post-war expansion of the social sciences saw both disciplines grow, but sociology in particular experienced a boom in the 1960s. It was this

rapid expansion and growing institutional dominance, especially in the new universities, [that] crystallised the diverging methodological, political and epistemological 'slots' (see Trouillot, 1991) apportioned the two disciplines. Once established, this divergence was difficult to reverse, despite the continued flow of ideas and individuals across the divide (Mills, 2008, p. 93-4).

Indeed, in 1964 when Worsley was appointed as Professor of Sociology at Manchester, "Gluckman fulfilled his vision for a joint anthropology and sociology department"; but this harmony was seven short years later interrupted in 1971 when the two disciplines "acrimoniously divorced", "typify(ing) the growing rivalry between two deeply intertwined fields" (Mills, 2008, p. 93). As Mills concludes, "the efforts by individuals such as Gluckman and Banton to forge

interdisciplinary alliances had little lasting impact on intellectual debates... As sociology grew and became more diverse, its relationship with anthropology became steadily less important... Gluckman's commitment to a dialogue with sociology faltered" (2008, p. 109).

Also noteworthy of this era, before the rift hardened, is what Peel suggests about the "historic intellectual prestige" of anthropology and "the growing institutional strength" of sociology, as well as "the openness of British sociology to an anthropology that conceived of itself as essentially sociological" which laid the tracks for intellectual synergies between the disciplines particularly in the face of the end of the British empire (2005, p. 88). That is to say, anthropologists became interested in "extending their subject-matter" in ways that led to a deepening of the intellectual, if not institutional, relationship with sociology (Peel, 2005, p. 75). Peel comments that the "reciprocal tendency of both subjects" had the effect of making British sociology "less parochial" and "to move abroad, taking development as one of its specialisms" (2005, p. 88).

Meanwhile, some social anthropology also 'came home' via the anthropological study of the West including Britain and other parts of Europe. For example, at 'home' in Britain, decolonisation brought the settlement of postcolonial people from Britain's former colonies to the UK. Over time this led to a new arena of

inquiry shared with sociology and cultural studies, focussed on ideas of race, ethnicity, identity, migration, diaspora, “nation and narration” and “processes of subjectification” (see also Peel, 2005, pp. 75; 91). Indeed, contemporary work within this trans-disciplinary area of study is evidenced by some of the articles in this volume that explore issues of postcoloniality, identity formation, whiteness, migration, race, ethnicity, class and nationhood.

But, as we have already indicated, this intellectual exchange and creativity did not lead to institutional fusion. It lead instead to division (Peel, 2005, p. 88). If we return to the period just before the 1960s expansion of universities, Spencer (2000) reminds us how “whilst sociology as an academic presence in Britain was arguably smaller and more dispersed than social anthropology”, by 1981 sociology “had expanded to more than 1,000 government-funded university positions, growing at almost 10 times the rate of social anthropology” (2000, p. 4). Unlike sociology which was being taught in the polytechnics and the Open University, in the vast majority of cases, anthropology was not. Additionally, unlike sociology, anthropology was not part of the A-level curriculum (A-Levels are the examinations that English and Welsh school children take for entry to University). This meant that whilst “[b]y the mid-1970s, more than 100,000 18-year-olds had studied sociology as an A-level examination subject; in 1999, the

figure for anthropology remained stuck on zero (Abrams, 1981)” (Spencer, 2000, p.5).

After a long campaign to change this, an anthropology A-level was established in 2010. Regrettably however the AQA has recently announced plans to terminate this new A-level (Cassidy, 2015). This is significant both in terms of the relative accessibility of the two disciplines to new students, but also arguably in terms of perpetuating the relative institutionalised discrepancy in size and scale between anthropology and sociology in the UK. There are of course any number of knock on effects that might follow, but one particularly obvious one is organisational. That is to say, the British Sociological Association has more members (and more funds) than the Association of Social Anthropologists which means that it can staff an office (with a dedicated team of 12) and mobilise greater resources.

The third point and final point we wish to make about the state of relations between anthropology and sociology in Britain is in part inspired by Holmwood and McKay’s recent piece in *the Sociological Review* (2015) on the consequences for sociology of the current audit culture within HE in the UK, but also casts an eye to the past. Today both disciplines are nervous about their

future. That is to say, a sense of unease pervades both disciplines, with worries over both funding cuts and a pernicious audit culture. Disciplinary identities surface and are reinforced in moments of institutional pressure and tension. These include recent debates over who 'we' might be paired up with on units of assessment panels for the British government's research assessment audits that evaluate individual department's research outputs and environment in order to distribute limited government funds. For instance, anthropology departments have baulked at the thought of being paired with sociology in panels on this assessment exercise; and sociology departments have been more concerned about the rise of social policy units that might consume them rather than what might be transpiring in anthropology (see Holmwood and McKay's 2015 reflections written after the most recent research assessment exercise known as the REF).

However, what statistical analysis of recent REF data shows is two cognate subjects that are not growing in research terms nor in institutional presence (cf Holmwood & McKay 2015). One reason given (by some anthropologists) as to why anthropology should not be combined with sociology institutionally or for audit was that sociology was too large. This was invoked as a reason not to join for fear of anthropology being 'swamped' by its larger neighbour. In light of the

institutional pressures on both disciplines in these austere and uncertain times for HE in the UK, we posit that this argument simply no longer holds up and needs urgent reconsideration, both for sociology units fearing what the upsurge of social policy units might mean for them, but also for anthropology units not recognising that a potential intellectual ally is nearby. Instead of seeing intellectual and institutional allies, the two disciplines often see a worrying Other.

This contemporary unease is one that resonates with recent history and the disquiet caused by the Thatcherite and the New Right's attack on the social sciences in the 1980s. This affected both disciplines, but especially sociology (Peel, 2005; Mills, 2008; Spencer, 2000). Indicative of this era is a revealing passage from Gledhill: "anthropology was spared much of the active aggression manifest towards sociology by neo-conservatives, even if it was deemed useless (for studying 'the pre-nuptial practices of the inhabitants of the Upper Volta', as Norman Tebbit, Margaret Thatcher's chief bull-dog, put it)" (2008, p. 169-170). Indeed, in anthropology's case, thirty years ago at the ASA Decennial in 1983, "the question for many participants was whether, in Thatcherite Britain, there even would be a social anthropology after the 1980s" (Spencer, 2000, p.13). This also was a decade in which no permanent academic jobs were

offered in British anthropology departments (Spencer, 2000, p.9), dire times indeed for the discipline. Our contention is that lessons from the recent past might help us see ways forward in which we can ally and rally, especially given the continuity of each discipline's intellectual foundations and interests. This is a trajectory of reciprocity and exchange that this volume seeks to advance.

In the light of these three main points, we argue that this volume provides new insight into how the most contemporary ethnographic, theoretical and methodological concerns of sociology and anthropology are also not fixed and categorical, but shifting, overlapping and intersecting. That is to say, in echoing (but also extending) the historical and institutional trajectories of the two disciplines, this volume demonstrates how anthropologists and sociologists studying aspects of contemporary British society share many points in common. It is to an overview of this monograph and how it furthers our aims that we now turn our attention.

Overview and scope of the volume

Over the last thirty years, there have been three edited volumes drawing together work within the anthropology of Britain (e.g. Cohen, 1982; 1985). The

most recent edited volume in this genre is Nigel Rapport's (2002) *British Subjects: An Anthropology of Britain*, published fifteen years ago. One aim of this monograph is to advance this genre by juxtaposing the most recent scholarship within the anthropology of Britain with the thoughts and reflections of foundational thinkers in this field, and put them into conversation with wider interdisciplinary debates, especially within sociology.

This volume thus includes chapters by a new generation of social anthropologists, as well as reflective, shorter, commentary pieces from social anthropologists whose work, as we have already indicated, has been responsible for consolidating an anthropology of Britain. The volume begins with two prefaces – the first by Steph Lawler, whose work has made a significant contribution to the feminist sociology of social class, and the second by Pnina Werbner, a social anthropologist whose research has explored postcolonial identities and the contested meanings of Britishness. Each author discusses a concern that transects anthropological and sociological theory and practice: Lawler provides commentary from a sociological perspective by emphasising the significance of the everyday to both sociological and anthropological work; Werbner reflects on issues of identity politics and multiculturalism that are central to sociology, anthropology and cultural studies.

While issues of the everyday are central to all the articles in this volume, the first three chapters are concerned specifically like Werbner with an interest in issues of nationhood, identity and belonging. These three chapters interrogate the meaning and usefulness of the idea of an anthropology of Britain, providing a pathway to consider the substantive and theoretical meanings of Britishness, home and the postcolonial. In Chapter 2, Cathrine Degnen and Katharine Tyler bring together sociological ideas of intersectionality with anthropological notions of intersection to reflect upon some of the ways in which the anthropology of Britain might usefully be deployed to interpret and explain contemporary post-colonial, post-industrial, white, classed, and placed-based identities. To think through some of the questions that arise from this endeavour, they draw on their individual ethnographic data of research in former coalmining towns in different regions of Britain. Alexander Smith continues Degnen and Tyler's discussion of Britishness in Chapter 3 to examine the meaning of Britishness in relation to 'the Scottish Question'. This chapter explores the implications of the Scottish referendum for sociological and anthropological ideas of postcoloniality, home and belonging, and what it means to identify with the anthropology of Britain in these uncertain times post the UK's referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. Laura Jeffery's contribution in Chapter 4

further the monograph's analysis of the meanings of Britishness and 'home'. Like A. Smith, Jeffery shows how one legacy of the British empire is that contemporary notions of Britishness cannot be contained to any simplistic notion of bounded geographical space. To do this Jeffrey draws on her research with displaced Chagos islanders and the dispersed Chagossian community in three English locales.

Read collectively, Chapters 5-7 illustrate how an anthropological approach to issues of social class, advanced capitalism and post-industrialism contributes to sociological analysis of social class. They offer ethnographic and theoretical insights that unsettle and disrupt media, social policy and political objectifications of white working class people's lives in contemporary Britain. In Chapter 5 Gillian Evans puts the anthropology and sociology of social class into conversation by drawing on recent anthropological research and theoretical reflection to explore the cultural turn in the sociology of social class. Evans deploys this framework to reflect upon the recent popularity of the UK Independence Party. Insa Koch's point of departure in Chapter 6 is the declining rates of electoral participation, dwindling membership rates of political parties and polls that chart the public's loss of trust in politicians that have been taken as evidence of an epidemic of apathy in Britain. Koch challenges this notion of

‘apathy’ to show that for the residents on a council estate in the south east of England, apathy is not equated with a withdrawal from electoral participation but carries meaning that subverts hegemonic representation, furthering Evans’ endeavours to identify the distinct contributions of an anthropology of Britain to sociological debates on social class. In Chapter 7, Katherine Smith draws on fieldwork in North Manchester to question the distortion in social discourse and political representations of benefits claimants. She argues that the lived experiences of people dependent upon social benefits represents an affront to the economic rationality inherent in welfare policy, and raises new questions about local senses of fairness and being a ‘fair person’.

Sarah Winkler-Reid’s Chapter 8 takes up the issue of market-based, neoliberalist reforms of the British education system and explores them through the lens of anthropological work on value and sociological work on commensuration. Via a focus on ‘ordinary ethics’ and personhood, Winkler-Reid examines how school children and teachers carve out important spaces of care that exceed simple measures of performance and audit. There is thus a significant arc of inquiry woven through the contributions of Koch, K. Smith and Winkler-Reid’s contributions whereby a moral economy of personhood and of value becomes evident in the face of power, precarity and inequality.

In Richard Irvine's Chapter 9, the role of the state is made evident in a different fashion: through the everyday management of the environment. He explores the importance of thinking about long-term environmental change for the understanding of human life and asks how might an anthropology of Britain engage with the geological realities of the landforms under our feet? And what kind of understanding of time is required in order to grasp how those landforms are changing? Irvine discusses how for the residents of the Fens, in East Anglia, long term environmental variability becomes, literally, unthinkable; yet he argues how these surface-level certainties of the present are called into question when the timescale of deep history is brought into view. In Chapter 10, Andrew Whitehouse continues Irvine's subversion and disruption of everyday and philosophical ideas about people and environment in his analysis of the relationships between place, birds and people. These are relationships once again inflected by the state, but ones also by seasonality and other species. Drawing from recent theoretical developments in more-than-human anthropology and sociology, he explores the ways in which people, birds, plants and other living beings are mutually imbricated in the world. Whitehouse's chapter brings the volume full-circle by returning to questions raised in earlier chapters to explore how his approach is suggestive of how we might reconsider both 'anthropology' and 'Britain'.

To open up a further space for dialogue between some of the themes discussed in this volume and the anthropology of Britain, the volume concludes with the thoughts and reflections of Jeanette Edwards, whose ethnographic work in the north west of England has been central to the anthropology of classed identities and notions of belonging in contemporary Britain. Edwards' commentary draws inspiration from and thus discusses the papers by Evans, K. Smith and Koch on social class. The volume concludes with an epilogue by Nigel Rapport who considers the implications of this volume for the meaning and progression of a confident, creative and critical anthropology of Britain.

To conclude this Introduction, we return to our central purpose and reflect on how we see this volume advancing our aim of putting the anthropology of Britain into conversation with sociology. In so doing we hope to draw out why we think this monograph will be of interest to both sociologists and anthropologists.

Firstly, our intention is for this collection of articles to be read as a staunch criticism of the bounding of anthropological and sociological fields of interest.

Our argument is that the institutional divisions often put to work to separate the disciplines have been to the detriment to the development and growth of both.

But yet we also recognise that in setting up this conversation between the disciplines we run the risk of shoring up the artificially constructed distinctions

between the disciplines that we hope to question. Still, we persist, convinced of the salience of speaking with, to and about the historical and contemporary points of both divergence and convergence.

All the articles in this monograph draw upon a project that is central to both the intellectual traditions of sociology and anthropology. This is namely the drawing together of ethnographic work and theoretical perspectives in order to interrogate and challenge dominant and taken-for-granted imaginaries about what it means to dwell in contemporary Britain. Furthermore, as Lawler's preface indicates, the chapters in this volume are interested in the details, rhythms and patterns of everyday life, a concern also central to sociological inquiry. For example, Evans examines the contrasting significance of differing aspects of Bourdieu's work to sociologists and anthropologists studying contemporary class formations in Britain. We also note that K. Smith and Koch in their study of white working class people's everyday lives cannot ignore the work of feminist sociological theorising on social class, and Winkler-Reid draws both on the sociology of education as well as the contributions of sociologists and others to debates on the nature of neoliberalism. Moreover, in our own article in this volume we interrogate the contrasts and complexities between sociological theories of intersectionality and anthropological approaches to

intersection, and Irvine finds inspiration from core sociological texts such as Weber to help him interrogate contemporary notions of the Anthropocene. It is precisely the divergent, shifting and overlapping ways in which sociologists and anthropologists approach aspects of British social life that we think offers not only a source of intellectual inspiration for anthropologists and sociologists alike but also opens up possible avenues for forging institutional alliances and solidarities in the current political and economic climate of uncertainty for both disciplines.

Finally, it is also worth reflecting on how, for both of us, the theoretical and empirical insights, arguments and ideas that are offered by this collection of articles has taken on a new socio-political significance and meaning in the face of the outcome of Britain's EU referendum in the summer of 2016. That is to say, the process of working closely with the authors of this volume in developing their contributions has provided us with a deep understanding of the sheer complexities that shape the lives of people in contemporary Britain. There have been many knee-jerk reactions since the referendum result was announced, ones seeking quick explanatory models for the vote to leave Europe. But what this volume and the anthropology of Britain more broadly has convinced us of is that the lived complexity of everyday lives cannot be reduced in any

straightforward way to neat and tidy explanations for the referendum outcomes. Instead, it is the experiences and realities explored in this volume that form the context of the Brexit vote. We believe that the contributions to this volume offer profound insight into the contexts in which individuals, families and communities across ethnic, class, national, generational and place-based identities made their decision for Britain to leave or to remain in the European Union, and that these are also the contexts which will shape how this new social, cultural, economic and political reality develops in the coming decades.

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